

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, October 5, 1875, with transcript

292 Essex St., Salem, Mass., October 5th, 1875. Dear Miss Mabel,

I have just finished a long letter to Hon. George Brown concerning my telegraphic schemes — and now I feel like writing a few lines to you to thank you for so promptly letting me know of your safe arrival home. I felt indeed more anxious than I care to tell you when I saw you drive off from the Station alone. The horse looked so spirited and you drove off so fast — that I felt I better lose my train — than let you run any danger. However when you stopped at the corner I knew you had control over the horse — and so stepped on board the cars with a lighter heart.

I found Dr. and Mrs, Marsh on board on their way to New York. Baby was there too looking well and comfortable. And an elderly lady whose name I forget. I hope you have obtained your drawing-book — and that you are making numerous sketches of Bethel and the neighborhood. Please remember me kindly to Miss True, and tell her how sorry I was not to see more of her. I hope she will come to Boston soon. Remember me also to my little friend — Helen I think her name is — but impress upon her memory the fact that I am not “Miss Bell”.

I was at Cambridge yesterday and your mother told me of a letter she had received from you on the subject of “Woman's Rights”. I never suspected that you were one of these people who think women have rights. Do you actually suppose their wishes are to be considered with the same respect as those of men? That their opinions are entitled to the same weight? That — when forced by circumstances to gain their livelihood — they are to be permitted to choose their occupations as men are?

Library of Congress

The wisdom of the world has decided that they are inferior beings doomed to exist within the narrow space called "Woman's Sphere". Why then should they seek to rebel against the decrees of fate?

Mrs. Mary Somerville was guilty of the most unladylike conduct in daring to write works on the Connection of the Physical Sciences. If Miss Herschel had only been banished to a Seminary for young ladies — she would have been taught very different things from photographing sun-spots! Nor would she have had the audacity to rob scientific men of the discovery of the connection between sun-spots and the Aurora Borealis! Why should any ambitious woman be allowed to invade man's sacred domains? And there is that Miss Susan Dimmock too — intended by nature to be a lady. Words are too weak to portray the enormity of her offences against society. Who would ever have thought of that pure womanly spirit willingly rebelling against the restraints³ that society had placed upon her sex — offending the feelings of her own kind — running the gauntlet of the world's criticism — and all for what? To do what men are paid to do. It is true it was to benefit the sick and dying — But are there not men enough in the world to do the work? Men paid, and paid well too — for performing those very duties. If she was obliged to earn her own living why did she not go to dressmaking or to teaching. These subjects are included in "Woman's Sphere"! Medicine and Surgery belong to man. Astronomy and the Physical Sciences are ours. All the professions and businesses that are most lucrative and honorable belong to us.

Why cannot women be contented with the condition in which the condition in which nature has placed them? Why should they seek to make themselves the equals of men? Must they be allowed to take the law into their own hands and think and act for themselves? Why can't they let us think and act for them? Would they not be happier so? Were not the negroes happier as slaves than they are now as freemen? Then they had no cares — They were not then called upon to battle with the world alone. Not that women are considered as slaves!

Library of Congress

Woman is free and we men guard her and protect her. We do everything for her. We attend her in sickness — we look after her law-affairs — we preach to her — we legislate for her — we do all her thinking for her - 4 in fact we leave her nothing to do but to dress — make fancy-work — and read novels! And yet women are discontented! What ingratitude!

They must have higher education! — they must be able to choose their own occupations! — they must vote! — in a word they must be free to do whatever they like! Do they not forget that they are different beings from ourselves?

If slaveholders could look upon “Liberty” as the mottoe of their flag without a blush — because their negroes had not white skins — why should not we adopt our mottoe “No taxation without Representation” — with free consciences knowing that women are not men.

Slaveholders asserted that the negroes ought to be slaves because they were unfitted for liberty.

Abolitionists said they were unfitted for liberty because they were slaves.

We say that women cannot acquire a higher education because their mental attainments are inferior to ours.

Women say their mental attainments are inferior to ours because they cannot acquire a higher education.

If we wont admit them to Harvard or Yale — they straightway obtain endowments for the Boston University — or have a College built for themselves — the selfish creatures — at Northampton.

Library of Congress

Where is all this to end? Not content with serving on our School Committees — they are agitating for political rights.

They are refusing to pay their taxes unless they are represented.

I suppose it will not be long before we have a woman wanting to be President of the United States! Well it is not for me to say her “Nay” — seeing that I am a subject of Queen Victoria — a woman-sovereign — and one of the best the world has seen — so my best wishes go with her. If women want anything they are sure to get it in the long run — so we better give in gracefully at once.

I trust you will return to Cambridge soon. I have just five minutes to catch my train to Boston.

Please excuse haste.

Yours sincerely, A. Graham Bell. Miss Mabel G. Hubbard, Bethel, Maine.